

Good morning. Mister Chairman, members of the Committee for the record--my name is Terri Elander. I am the International and Public Relations Director for the Missoula Children's Theatre. I am delighted to be here on behalf of Grant #1264, requesting funding for Operational Support.

MCT was founded in 1970 and we began touring in 1973 with a single production in Miles City. Today, we reach thousands of kids in Montana each year. Our mission is "the development of lifeskills in children through participation in the performing arts." MCT produces full-scale musical theatre productions---from audition to performance with 50-60 local children---in just one week.

This creative process takes commitment, practical application and hard work; but the rewards are great. Schools, PTAs and service clubs invite MCT to their communities because they believe it benefits the children—they see heightened self-esteem, commitment and--well--joy. They also see an increase in local sales through ticket purchases, restaurant celebrations and opening night gifts. The Arts are not just good for the **soul**....they are good for the economy!

This year, MCT will visit 125 Montana communities, casting nearly 7,000 school-aged students. Based on census and internal data, we estimate that over 25,000 children will be involved as cast members, assistant directors or workshop participants—approximately 13% of Montanans between the ages of 5 and 18.

From Stanford's "Robin Hood" last November and Kalispell's "Rumpelstiltskin" this week, to "The Little Mermaid" in Hinsdale next month, our actor/directors cover the state, in little red trucks...packed with everything needed to produce a show...except the cast!

Each touring show is developed at our home office in Missoula. The Tour is a year-round project and we employ dozens of local staff members as costumers, directors, scene painters, writers and administrative support. Our facility also serves as a community center for local MCT productions and public events.

Our constituents really say it best and here are a couple of examples:

From Ennis, MT

“We are a non-profit group focused on bringing fine arts programs into our schools. We feel that the MCT Residency helps students become better public speakers, as well as enhances the English curriculum. In addition, the workshops also enhance the music program, teaching the kids in a new and unique manner.”

From St. Ignatius, MT

“We had a student with special needs who has a disability similar to Downs Syndrome, who was a wolf in The Jungle Book. She remembered lines and sang with the group. She had a fantastic experience! The MCT folks did a great job of including her. Her family was thrilled and everyone was proud of her. Thank You!!

And I thank YOU for providing this opportunity for me to testify on behalf of the Missoula Children's Theatre.